boats was also raised by External Affiars Minister, Shri K. Natwar Singh, during his recent bilateral visit to Pakistan from February 15-17, 2005.

During the Foreign Secretary level talks held at Islamabad on December 27-28, 2004 it was decided to grant consular access to all the prisoners held in each other's country within three months from the date of their arrest, and repatriation would be done immediately after completion of sentence and nationality verification.

Subsequently, Pakistan has provided consular access to approximately 100 civilian prisoners and 650 fishermen in January and February 2005. The process of release and repatriation would follow confirmation of nationality and completion of sentences.

Government, through diplomatic channels, have also been consistently taking up the issue of early release of Indian POWs believed to be in Pakistan's custody since 1971-72. However, Pakistan Government has been consistently denying existence of any Indian POWs in Pakistan. The matter was alslo taken up during the meeting between Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and the Prime Minister of Pakistan on November 24, 2004.

Election in Iraq

†348. SHRI E.M. SUDARSANA NATCHIAPPAN:
SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) how the Indo-Iraq relations would be in the new scenario of the fresh political situation arisen in Iraq after the elections;

(b) whether Govrnment have vindicated the elections, recently held in Iraq;

(c) if so, whether Government would give recognition to the new government in Iraq in the new context and if not, the reasons therefor;

(d) whether in the view of Government the new election in Iraq is the first phase towards the restoration of democratic process there; and

(e) if so, the initiative taken by the Indian Government of the protection of human rights in Iraq?

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (e) India has close and friendly relations with the people of Iraq. The holding of elections in Iraq in January 30, 2005 is a noteworthy development that would hopefully set in motion a process that would lead to the Iraqi people taking full control of their destiny. India will continue to interact with new Government in Iraq. India stands for the right of the Iraqi people to freely determine their political future.

List of Indian prisoners released by Pakistan

349. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan Government has recently released a list of over 180 Indians in its jails;

(b) if so, the steps being taken by the Indian Government to secure their release and by when they are expected to be repatriated;

(c) what according to the Indian Government's information and estimation is the number of Indians at present languishing in Pak jails; and

(d) what specific efforts are being made to secure the release of all of them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Pakistani media on February 2, 2005, reported that the Pakistan Government has prepared a list of 182 Indian prisoners in Pakistani jails.

(b) Government has taken up the matter with the Government of Pakistan for confirmation and for early grant of consular access as well as release and repatriation.

(c) As per available information, approximately 900 civilian prisoners, over 650 fishermen and 54 POWs are believed to be in custody in Pakistan.

(d) Government, through diplomatic channels, has been consistently taking up the matter with Pakistan including at the highest level. During the Foreign Secretary level talks held at Islamabad on December 27-28, 2004 it was decided to grant consular access to all the prisoners held in